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JOHANNESBURG MARCHERS FINED, SCORE 'ARBITRARY' LAW

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- Two Anglican bishops were among 35 South African church leaders found guilty of contravening the country's Riotous Assemblies Act. Three elected to go to jail for 50 days rather than pay a fine.

The 35 were among 53 church people arrested May 26 and held overnight after they had staged a peaceful march in downtown Johannesburg to protest detention of a Colored (mixed race) clergyman who was later freed.

A Johannesburg magistrate on July 1 found the 35 persons guilty of attending an illegal gathering and disturbing traffic. He fined them \$70, with the alternative of 50 days in jail.

All the accused, including black activist Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, and Bishop Timothy Bavin of Johannesburg, pleaded innocent to the first charge, but guilty to the second.

Bishop Tutu's wife, Leah, who was among those charged, said after the case was heard that all but three of the 35 had chosen to pay the fine.

All defendants told the court that the Riotous Assemblies Act under which they were being prosecuted was "arbitrary." The act can outlaw virtually any meeting or march.

"I cannot obey laws that are in conflict with God," said one of the defendants, the Rev. Cecil Begbie, a Methodist minister. "The Bible speaks of justice, mercy, freedom for all, and the preservation of a man's dignity. Where state legislation violates these, I have no option but to obey God rather than man."

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